

## THE BROKEN MIRROR

By Adam Breede

"Don't put that mirror in!"

The speaker was Nestor Fagundes, a young Brazilian who was to be my interpreter on a hunting trip in the jungles of Minas Geraes.

"Why not?" I queried, continuing to pack my shaving outfit.

"Because it will bring us bad luck," was the quick response.

"Oh, superstitious, eh?" I laughingly replied.

"Yes, everybody is superstitious down here and especially the hunters."

That is true.

Early all hunters and sportsmen have considerable respect for omens and luck. They believe that signs come forth before certain events. This is not only true of the sportsmen of South America, but of every country.

Black cats, white mules, mirrors and dreams of every kind play an important part in the sportsman's life.

## They're Off.

It was 4 o'clock in the morning when we finished packing our hunting outfit in the Hotel Avenida at Rio de Janeiro, and an hour later found us aboard the train headed northwest, steaming towards Matipoo, which is the end of the railroad, nearly 500 miles distant.

"When do we eat?" I asked my companion about 10 o'clock that morning.

"I don't know," came the response.

"Well, if I could talk Portuguese I certainly would know where we could get breakfast."

Just then the conductor came in and my young friend quizzed him, and then announced to me that we would have 20 minutes for lunch at the next station.

That was good news, as I had an appetite like a bear that had just come out from hibernating.

No sooner had the train come to a stop than we jumped off and made our way to an eating stand close by. Just as we had finished giving our order, "Toot! toot!" went the engine and immediately the train got under motion.

My companion caught the front end of the last car, while I arrived just in time to grab hold of the rear end.

## First Bad Luck.

By this time the engine was well under motion and was going at such a speed as to drag me along the railroad for about 100 yards.

Of course, I wanted to see which was the stronger, a Brazilian locomotive or myself, and to my astonishment, I found that that engine pulled that whole train right out of my left hand.

When I got to my feet the train was about one-quarter of a mile away, but was beginning to slow down. Running as hard as I could in my hunting boots, and waving my hands frantically, I finally caught the train and continued the journey.

Nothing that I was rubbing my left arm constantly, my companion remarked: "See, that is what you get for putting that mirror in."

To which I sharply retorted: "Oh, it never would have happened if it were not for the mirror."

Two days later we arrived at Matipoo and immediately got action to continue our journey by ox-carts and horseback as far into the jungles as possible.

We went down valleys and over mountains without a mishap, but all the time the condition of the garments in my left arm was not improving. But as every sportsman must have an excuse when he misses his mark, I had a good alibi.

## No Indoor Sport.

Now, hunting big game in the jungles of South America, is anything but an indoor sport. In truth, it is much harder work than hunting grizzlies in the Rockies because there is much climbing to do and the heat is so intense.

As we journeyed along, little white crosses covered with white and blue paper could be seen dotting either side of the road or trail.

Each one of those crosses marked a spot where some native had been murdered. The crosses averaged from two to five feet high and in each case had been placed by some close relative or near friend of the victim.

Our first real camp was built in the heart of the jungles within a mile of a small lake.

But we had been warned against going near this place as it was one of the most fever-stricken districts in the northern part of Brazil.

However, this was the big game country, and it was that kind of game that I was after, so we established a delightful little camp in short order.

## Plenty of Game.

That no mistake had been made in the selection of the camping spot, was quite apparent by the fact that within a couple of days we had two tapirs, several monkeys, a tiger, wild boar and many birds to our credit.

While the natives were skinning the big tapir, which weighed about 800 pounds, I discovered an ideal spot where one could sit and smoke and reflect on the doings of the day and dream of the chase.

It was not long before I had the place entirely cleared in the form of a circle, and a huge Aroeira tree stood like a giant in the center. Its branches were high and just far enough apart to let the soft moonbeams through.

It was evening and I had builded my campfire and sat quietly meditating beneath that aroeira tree.

"Say, this is some place you have fixed up," remarked young Fagundes, as he entered through the doorway made of palms.

"Yes," I replied. "And we certainly have a bunch of trophies, regardless of the fact that I packed the mirror along."

"You are right, but we are not through yet," came the reply as Nestor Fagundes sat down on a log close to the fire.

## Move Bad Luck.

Then, seeming to notice for the first time the giant tree that marked the center of the camp, he exclaimed in a somewhat startled voice:

"Do you know what kind of a tree that is?"

I replied that I did not.

"That is an aroeira tree."

"A what?" I asked.

"An Aroeira tree," he replied rather curtly.

"Well, what of it?" I queried.

"That will bring you bad luck, sure."

A ringing laugh burst from my lips.

"That is all right," said my friend. "You may laugh, but any native here will tell you that that is the tree of bad luck and it also produces a skin disease. They say that the bad effects of this tree can only be avoided by treating the tree just as if it were a man."

"How's that?"

"Well, every time you pass close to this tree, you are to take off your hat religiously and say either good morning, good afternoon, good evening or how-do-you-do."

Whereupon I immediately arose, doffed my hat, turned and backed in a most gallant fashion, at the same time addressing the tree with:

"Good evening, my friend. How goes every little thing?"

Then turning with a laugh I sat down to continue my smoke.

"It is quite evident that you are not superstitious in the least or you would not treat this tree so lightly," remarked my comrade, as he heaped another log on the fire.

"Well, you see I respect your belief enough in superstition to address the tree to show that I meant to be friendly to it."

From then on the conversation continued along the line of omens and luck.

## A Tiger!

It was a beautiful Brazilian moonlight night. The entire heavens were clear and the myriad of stars winked and blinked through the leafy trees from every direction.

Amid such surroundings and in such a wonderful atmosphere it was perfectly natural that we should be in high spirits over the successful hunt.

The guide and native helpers had long since retired, but young Fagundes sat with me by the dying embers until the midnight hour strolled around.

We had scarcely retired when the thunderous roar of a tiger echoed and re-echoed throughout the jungle.

Almost at the same time I heard a piercing cry of a human voice, in shrieks of terror.

Springing to my feet, I saw the camp cook leaning against a tree in the moonlight. He was trembling and his eyes appeared to be bulging out. It was some time before he calmed down sufficiently to explain that the tiger had come within about 10 feet of where he was sleeping, when he belched forth his mighty roar. Then the entire camp was awake, and excitement ran high. But there was nothing to do but to go back to bed and be ready for the morrow's hunt.

"That is what I call bringing your game right into camp, young fellow," I remarked to Fagundes. "You can't beat that for luck."

"But you haven't bagged him yet," was the calm retort.

## The Mirror Broken.

Just then the stillness of the night was again broken by the howl of the beast.

There was considerable hustling next morning around camp and we got an early start. We did not have to hunt very long until we came upon fresh tracks of a monster tiger. We trailed it through the jungle until late that afternoon and then decided to hunt the animal by night.

Returning to camp we ate roast tapir and wild boar. While the natives seemed to enjoy the boiled

monkeys about as much as anything.

That afternoon I accidentally dropped the mirror off of a tree and broke it to bits.

"There," cried my young friend interpreter, "Now you will have bad luck."

"Yes," I replied. "And seven-years of it. However, I am not going to lose any sleep over it."

The sole topic of the conversation that day was about the big tiger.

Taking an early start that afternoon we went by horseback as far as we could, going down deep canyons and up to the point of a jagged mountain where we found fresh tracks of the tiger, just as we had figured.

## A Dog for Bait.

We had brought a native dog along as bait. Tying the dog to some brush, we found a fine tree in which we could camp for the night.

It was the work of a few minutes for young Fagundes and myself to get comfortably located high up in the boughs of a tree where we were carefully screened.

The sun had just gone down and the heavens began to grow dark. The darkness seemed to affect the dog, for the howl that it put up could have been heard around that mountain.

It certainly did seem that nothing could prevent us from getting that tiger before morning—the stage was properly set for it.

We were dressed for comfort, wearing helmets which were completely covered with netting, and leather gloves to protect our hands from the mosquitoes. That we were prepared for an all-night siege was evident by the looks of our lunch bag.

The dog objected most seriously to being tied, so it kept up a constant baying and howling, which was just the thing necessary to attract the tiger.

The odds were a 30-to-1 shot that we would not return to camp empty-handed, and I was remarking about this to young Fagundes, who replied:

"Yes, I will admit chances could not be more favorable than they are now, but I would feel better about it if you hadn't broken that mirror."

As if in answer to my statement, a startling crash came, apparently from a clear sky. A blinding streak of lightning was followed by deep, roaring thunder.

It came so suddenly that neither of us could speak for some time.

Then I broke the silence. "It looks as if we were going to have a bad storm."

"Yes," replied my companion. "The wind is rising, and it is sprinkling now."

So quietly had the storm approached that we did not realize the danger.

In hopes that the storm would soon pass we remained on the windy perch, which was swaying wildly back and forth high above the thicket.

Crash!

Another blinding streak of lightning painted the heavens.

Immediately it seemed a cloudburst had taken place and that we were in the center of it.

Darkness covered the mountain. Cautiously making our way down the giant tree we reached the ground, drenched to the skin.

Loosening the dog, we went blindly down the mountain.

## The Raging Creek.

Reaching the bottom of the canyon, a roaring sound could plainly be heard above the piercing rain and whistling of the high wind—the little creek had within a few minutes grown into a madly, winding, treacherous stream.

Fortunately, I had an electric flasher, for it was only by constant use of it and much dangerous climbing that a fallen tree was located spanning the stream.

Whether the dog followed us across on the fallen tree or not I do not know, but it was waiting for us when we reached our horses.

In place of the storm abating it grew worse, and at times it was hard to sit in the saddle, as the horses with bowed heads and stumbling feet faced it.

There was no road or trail to be guided by and even had there been it would have been impossible to see it.

The horses were given free reign to find their way back to camp, which eventually they did.

The natives greeted us with much excitement, as they thought we would either be lost or drowned.

That night we appreciated warm, woolen blankets more than ever before.

For three days and nights the sky was murky, streams all badly swollen and it was impossible to hunt.

The natives became discouraged and frightened. They informed me that I was camping in the most fever-stricken district in that part of Brazil and that if I stayed there a week I would be a dead man. I asked them how they knew that the fever season was now on and they said that the rainy season had come to stay. When questioned how they knew this, they pointed to the millions of fireflies that sparkled here and there in the jungles.

## Natives Afraid.

No inducement I could offer to persuade them to remain—the entire bunch of skimmers and helpers departed in a body and left me with only a guide, one helper and my interpreter.

Undoubtedly the natives were right, for we remained in camp near the lake several days longer, but never even got a chance to hunt.

Breaking camp, our little party of four started on a 25-mile trip down the river, where game was said to be plentiful and climatic conditions better.

Going as far as possible by horseback, we secured a dory two feet wide and 20 feet long, piled our duffel in and started down the river. We tried to pick up a native or two to go with us to man the boat, but all refused, saying that it was too dangerous, as the trip could not be made without accident.

They pointed out that the river had risen seven feet and that there were dangerous rapids ahead.

The river was as wild as a March hare and our little dory shot down the stream at a rapid pace. We could not help but feel a thrill of excitement as we fought our way along and especially when we came in sight of the first rapids.

The guide and the native helper were throwing a constant barrage of Portuguese back and forth at each other and each sentence was punctuated with an exclamation.

They used their utmost efforts to steer away from the rocks where the water was boiling, seething, hissing and churning about.

## In the Rapids.

Young Fagundes and I braced ourselves in the dory, holding our guns in our hands ready to throw them on the shore in case of accident. Just when it looked as though the boat was under control it was caught in the rapids and whirled completely around into the foaming mass. For an instant it looked as though nothing could save us from taking a treacherous trip over the rapids.

Again the boat took another swift turn and was being carried sideways into the churning waters when the guide sprang upward, caught hold of the thick limb of an overhanging tree and cried for help. It was only after a hard struggle that we were able to land the dory and its contents all safely.

This same performance was repeated three times that afternoon. Having passed the last rapids, and with darkness coming on we selected a place for our camp.

Being dog-tired, we slept until the hot rays of the morning sun awakened us. Not until late in the afternoon did we make any attempt at hunting.

"We are now in the heart of the best hunting section in northern Brazil," remarked the guide as we made our way through the jungle. Continuing, he said:

"Tapir, tapir, everywhere. I assure you plenty of shots at them tomorrow. Just then he stooped down and examined the earth.

## Another Tiger.

"Ah ha!" he exclaimed. "Tiger, Tiger."

Sure enough, there was the first print of a large tiger's paw.

"Much grande," he remarked as he designated the size of the tiger with his hands.

We turned to trail the tiger, but it had crossed over the top of the mountain and undoubtedly far down the valley.

We returned to camp that night empty-handed, but filled with confidence and hope for the morrow.

The next day the guide took the dogs to the edge of the river where we had found the tiger tracks. They sniffed, gave a doop, long bay and started through the jungle.

Hour after hour we made our way close on the heels of the hounds, every minute expecting to jump the tiger. But when the noonday sun hit the heavens we, as well as the dogs, were completely fagged out and it was almost impossible to hunt between 11 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon. There was nothing for us to do but lie down in the shade and rest. During this time the guide kept repeating and assuring us there would be no trouble getting tapirs, as he said there were tracks everywhere.

"If we no get tiger today we get

tapir tomorrow, sure," said the guide.

"All right," I replied. "Tomorrow will be devoted entirely to tapir hunting."

And it was.

But we were no more successful hunting tapir than we were hunting tiger.

## Searching Parties.

The next day two natives came strolling into camp. They explained they had been sent out in search of us by some friends in a nearby valley, as the report had got out that we were crazy with the fever and that we were either dead or running hopelessly about in the jungle. They also reported that three different searching parties had been sent out trying to locate us, with instructions to take us back to the town. We entertained them that day and tried to get them to remain with us, but they refused, saying that they were afraid of the fever.

While the weather was most favorable in every respect and we hunted from the break of dawn until dusk, we never got sight of another tiger or tapir.

"Didn't I tell you that we would not have any more luck after you broke that looking glass?" my friend and interpreter reminded me.

"Yes," I replied. "But we are not through yet. Can't you hear those apes chattering in the trees over there? And listen—there! That's a barbado. We'll get that bird tomorrow."

When I mentioned barbado the guide began to show new signs of life. He told us that there were quite a number of those apes up there that stood on their hind feet and walked like a man, and had long whiskers.

He said that all natives were afraid to hunt them, but he was not and that he would take us out early in the morning over the thicket in which the apes were now so loudly chattering.

It was nearly 3 o'clock the next afternoon before we caught sight of a barbado. It sat in the bushy tree and at first glance looked like a small red-headed Irishman, decorated with whiskers. The barbado saw us about the same time we saw it and in a flash disappeared in the jungle.

Quietly we hunted for some sign of the barbado.

## Five Barbados.

After an hour we were rewarded. Having just come up out of a little ravine we placed our guns against the trunk of a tree and went to a small nearby spring to get a drink. Hearing a slight noise I glanced up and then stood almost riveted in the spot with amazement. There, almost above me, were five barbados in one tree. I saw them all at once. Quickly I secured my gun, but when I looked again all I could see was the shaking of the branches in the tree they just left. I fired three quick shots in that direction, but unfortunately none of them found meat.

The guide and my interpreter had also fired in that direction but were equally unsuccessful.

Turning around, I saw one of the large, long-haired barbados swinging from the top of one tree to another. It just missed catching hold of an extended branch and was swiftly swinging back. Once again its long body shot through the air. At the same time I fired my .401 automatic. But the beast had landed safely in the tree-top and quickly disappeared.

"That broken mirror sure gives us all bad luck," remarked the guide as we again made our way back to camp empty-handed, at least that is the way young Fagundes interpreted his sentence.

The helper also placed the blame of all bad luck on the mirror, and reminded us that we would be fortunate if we got out of the jungles alive.

The broken mirror had begun to get on the nerves of the guide and helper, just as it had upon the nerves of my interpreter. They even said that was the cause of us being covered with ticks and foot-lice.

The ticks were bad enough but the foot-lice were much worse, as they made us lame. But the ticks could be pulled off of the various parts of the body but the lice had to be dug out or cut out of our feet—most of them boring their way deep into the flesh between the toes, or underneath the toenails. Some even buried themselves deep into the heel, and caused inflammation to set in very quickly.

"I'm sick and want to go home," complained the helper upon reaching camp. Then the guide served notice that he was going to leave the next day. After much persuasion, I finally got them to agree to remain one day longer, as I was anxious to get a few more specimens.

When I retired that night I

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